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## Censorship and Secrecy: the Political Economy of Communication and the Military

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# Censorship and Secrecy: the Political Economy of Communication and the Military

Tom Clonan

## Research and reporting: military censorship

The political economy of communication encompasses a broad body of literature that explores linkages between mass communication media and power brokers or 'elites' at a societal level (Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 1995; Chomsky, 1996; Downing et al., 1995; Golding and Murdock, 1996; Herman et al., 1998; Keeble, 2000; Kellner, 2001; Mc Chesney and Wood, 1998; Mosco, 1996; Schiller, 1992). The literature focuses on a number of key power brokers within society such as the legislature, judiciary and a wide variety of powerful state agencies, including the armed forces, that would seek in their interactions with media organisations to regulate, control and direct public communication. The literature equally identifies powerful business and corporate interests within the commercial sector as power brokers who through ownership, direct investment and the powerful influence accruing from advertising revenues condition 'compliant' print and electronic media that constantly re-state hegemonic views and positions. The study of how these power brokers interact is often referred to as political economy (Mosco, 1996). Boyd-Barrett (1995:186) defines the political economy of communication as follows:

The term 'political economy' in communication research has a broadly 'critical' signification, often associated with macro-questions of media ownership and control, interlocking directorships and other factors that bring together media industries with other media and with other industries and with political economic and social elites ... Secondly, political economy also has an interest 'in examining the social whole or the totality of social relations that constitute the economic, political, social and cultural fields'. Thirdly, it is committed to moral philosophy, having an interest in social values and moral principles.

The purpose of this article is to examine specifically the 'social whole or totality of social relations' that exists between communications researchers in the academic field along with communications practitioners in the journalistic field with the armed forces. In order to focus on these two particular stakeholder relationships, the author will reflect on two unique sets of experiences, initially as an academic researcher with the Irish military and subsequently as a journalist in practice with the US military. The article will demonstrate the explicit manner in which both the Irish and international military operate – consistent with critical aspects of the political economy of communication rationale – to control information flow and to seek to limit or restrict by way of censorship any messages that are perceived to be threatening to the vested interests of the powerful.

## The communications researcher and the Irish military

In 1995, the author of this article, then a serving army officer in the Irish Permanent Defence Forces (PDF), completed an MA in Communications in Dublin City University



(DCU). On completion of the MA, the author commenced researching a PhD into the 'Status and Roles Assigned Female Personnel in the Irish Defence Forces'. The PhD consisted of an exhaustive equality audit of the Defence Forces' internal communications environment, in terms of written policies or evolved 'de facto' standard operating procedures, as they applied to female soldiers.

In commencing this research, the author enjoyed privileged access to the research setting as an 'insider'. (For 'insider' research in secretive settings, see Van Maanen, 1982: 116; Renzetti and Lee, 1993: 5; Maykut and Morehouse, 1996: 70; Mitchell, 1993: 47). The Defence Forces, like most armies, comprise a workplace setting which is for the most part confined within a series of fortified premises throughout the state. Casual physical access to such a setting – let alone the privileged and prolonged access to documents and informants necessary for research – would be almost impossible for the 'traditional' model of PhD student. Such a student, normally a university 'outsider' with negotiated access to the setting via the organisational gatekeeper, would have severely limited access to informants and documents within a military setting.

Even as an insider (a commissioned officer at the rank of lieutenant) the author was still required to receive written permission from the general staff in order to conduct the doctoral research. The permission to conduct the research was granted to the author by his superiors on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1996. The letter of permission, referenced CC/A/CS3/8, contained a number of conditions for the conduct of the research. Specifically it stated,

I am directed to inform you that the Director of Training approves Lt. Clonan's request to produce a Doctoral Thesis on the subject outlined provided that,

- a. The work is not published
- b. The exercise is funded by himself
- c. Any time off necessary is sanctioned

The literature on research methodology is filled with references to powerful 'gatekeepers', such as the Director of Training, whose permission must be sought in order to enter the field (Jorgensen, 1989: 45-6; Renzetti and Lee, 1993: 27, 123-30; Smith and Kornblum, 1996: 22; Mitchell, 1993: 10; Van Mannen, 1982: 108-9). The literature on research methodology suggests that such gatekeepers may impose conditions or restrictions on researchers and may in certain circumstances go so far as to attempt to influence the outcomes of research. Bernard (1988: 161) warns of such preconditions. Renzetti and Lee (1993: 27) echo such warnings:

Powerful gatekeepers can impose restrictions on researchers in ways that constrain their capacity to produce or report on findings that threaten the interests of the powerful.

The precondition 'provided that ... the work is not published' had far reaching effects for the researcher. Whilst data gathering within the setting was made possible with the letter of permission, at a later point, when the doctoral research was to be presented for examination, the Registrar's office in DCU sought a legal opinion on the military authorities' precondition 'provided that ... the work is not published'. In 1998, DCU's solicitors had formed the view that to circulate the PhD to officers of the university for the purposes of examination would constitute a form of publication. The author was informed that he would have to return to the gatekeeper – the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces – and seek a clarification or a 'letter of comfort' giving DCU permission to examine the doctoral thesis and lodge it to the library.

The issue around publication of the dissertation was complicated by two further matters. The audit of policies, standard operating procedures and memoranda within the PDF as they applied to female personnel necessitated consultation with an archive of documents within the research setting that came under the scope of the Official Secrets



Act. Simply stated, all of the documentary data consulted or made available to the researcher were classified as 'Restricted', 'Confidential' or 'Secret'. In addition, as an unanticipated and unexpected outcome of the research process, the findings uncovered evidence of widespread sex-based discrimination and bullying against female personnel within the PDF.

Bearing these factors in mind, the data contained within the doctoral thesis fits the classic definition within the literature on research methodology as to what constitutes 'sensitive' research. Renzetti and Lee (1993:5) define such a subject as

A sensitive topic is one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding and/or dissemination of research data.

The research material was certainly sensitive, as it was concerned with systematic barriers to paid employment in the public service for women wishing to join the Defence Forces along with the abuse of female employees within the PDF. The research material did not contain any information that compromised the operational or intelligence security of the Defence Forces. Despite this and given that the Official Secrets Act contains a clause allowing for the communication of 'restricted' information 'when it is his (sic) duty in the interests of the State to communicate it' (Section 4, Official Secrets Act, 1963) the researcher found himself in the invidious position of having to seek further clarification/permission in relation to the examination of his research from a potentially hostile employer – a personal and professional dilemma that, to my knowledge, no other researcher within DCU has had to face.

The personal and professional dilemmas for 'insider' researchers posed by the twin factors of secrecy and sensitivity are not dealt with in a comprehensive manner in mainstream literature on academic research methodology (see Miller, 1998). The researcher duly contacted the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces and received written permission from him on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1998 to 'Conduct Research and Produce PhD Thesis'. In this letter addressed to the Registrar of DCU and contained as an appendix within the PhD thesis, the then Chief of Staff states:

In June of 1996, Captain Clonan sought and received permission to produce a PhD thesis on female personnel within the PDF ... This is to confirm that the Defence Forces have no objections to the publication of the thesis for academic purposes. The thesis may be circulated to officers of the university and any internal examiners for the purposes of evaluation and examination. The thesis may also be held in the library of the university for reference purposes.

This allowed the PhD thesis to be examined. Finally, in November 2000, the PhD thesis was lodged to the library in DCU. Some of the findings of the thesis in relation to the bullying and sexual harassment of female personnel within the PDF found its way into the wider public domain in August 2001 when Ireland's largest circulation tabloid newspaper *The Sunday World* ran a story on the issue. This article was followed up by the remainder of the tabloid and broadsheet newspapers during the final weeks of August and received extensive print and electronic media coverage. The then Minister for Defence, at the author's behest, convened an independent enquiry into the author's research which reported in March, 2003. This independent 'Study Review Group' vindicated the researcher's findings in relation to the treatment of women personnel within the Defence Forces.

Despite the fact that the Chief of Staff gave permission for the PhD to be lodged to the library in DCU in 1998 and that since 2000 the research has been on the public record in an accessible academic repository, many of the serious issues raised by its findings, specifically with reference to sex-based discrimination within the PDF, have not yet been publicly aired. As of March 2006, over five years since the research was



published in DCU library, the PDF still had no explicit equality mission statement or comprehensive and well-publicised equality policies as would be advocated in the literature on equality matters and as would be understood by official bodies such as the Equality Authority in Ireland. In this regard, the Irish military authorities would also appear to be out of step with their counterparts in the British and US military.

Over a quarter of a century after women were permitted access to the organisation in 1980, the PDF at three per cent female strength has the one of the lowest female participation rates among the ranks of the European military. The average strength for female personnel among NATO armies is around 15 per cent. The US military comprises between 20 and 25 per cent female personnel.

The author would contend that the preconditions imposed by the military authorities have placed limitations on the widest possible dissemination of the findings of this research. This is a negative dynamic that is identified in both the current literature on research methodology and in the political economy of communication. In both canons, such a negative dynamic is hypothesised as being consistent with or contributing to the preservation of a given status quo – in this case perhaps for an all-male elite (the general staff) within a male-dominated organisation (the PDF).

## The journalism practitioner and the US military – Guantanamo Bay

In addition to lecturing in the School of Media, Dublin Institute of Technology, the author is also a member of the National Union of Journalists and is a journalist in practice. Following retirement from the military and particularly following the 9/11 attacks in September 2001, the author has provided constant military and security analysis to both the print and electronic media in Ireland and Britain on a freelance basis. In September of 2005 this freelance arrangement was formalized in the print media context and the author became Security Analyst for *The Irish Times*.

In this capacity, the author applied to visit the US detention facility in Guantanamo Bay in order to report on and analyse conditions there. The US military authorities at the US Naval Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba responded positively to this request. As part of the US military's Southern Command (Southcom) area of responsibility, the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay comes under the command of the Joint Task Force Guantanamo (JTF-GTMO) and runs as a parallel operation and support to the US military operation in Afghanistan.

In a process similar to that undergone by journalists seeking to be 'embedded' with US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, JTF-GTMO required the author to undergo a comprehensive background professional and security screening prior to consenting to the visit. This screening included a formal request from the US military authorities for such details as Irish social security number, home and business address, press accreditation details, passport details and samples of previously published newspaper articles.

This pre-screening of the journalist, including as it does a request for previously published material, is suggestive of a pre-emptive effort on the part of the US military authorities to pre-censor potentially disruptive journalists or reportage. This would appear to be consistent with the highly selective exercise of control by powerful gatekeepers alluded to in the earlier part of this article – where access to sensitive information is often granted only when certain preconditions are met. In this instance, one of the preconditions sought by the 'powerful elite', in this case JTF-GTMO, appears to consist of an auditing of copy for evidence of compliance or otherwise with US foreign policy imperatives.

With the screening complete and the consent given in principle, the author had to satisfy the visa requirements for work in the United States. During the visa interview, the author was asked if he had ever participated in or witnessed a conflict. The author



was also asked to indicate if he had ever trained in the use of weapons or explosives or visited such countries as Syria or Lebanon – presumably territories listed as ‘rogue’ states by the US Department of Homeland Security. Having answered ‘yes’ to all of these questions in the spirit of full disclosure, the author was then understandably asked to explain where such expertise and exposure was acquired. My account of UN service as a commissioned officer in the PDF was sufficient to allay any suspicions on the part of the US embassy staff who were unfailingly courteous and helpful.

However, it did strike me that a history of such visits to ‘rogue’ states by other journalists – particularly those not ‘embedded’ with US forces – might in some way constitute a barrier, legitimate or otherwise, to entry into the United States. In this way, security screening, in unscrupulous hands, might be used to pre-emptively censor or deny entry to journalists perceived as ‘non-compliant’ or ‘off-message’.

With US visa and JTF-GTMO requirements satisfied, the author finally received an officially approved and stamped US Navy ‘Area Clearance Request’ form for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. On arrival by air to Guantanamo Bay the author was only allowed to exit the plane on production of this form.

Having been granted permission to ‘dismount’ the aircraft by a number of heavily armed US troops at Guantanamo, the author was then asked to sign the ‘Ground Rules’ or JTF-GTMO’s ‘Media Policy at Naval Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba’. This comprehensive, five page document contained a litany of restrictions and pre-conditions on reporting which effectively limit the journalist’s ability to fully describe conditions at Guantanamo Bay.

The restrictions which are too numerous to fully explore here contain such blanket phrases as:

By signing this document, a National Media Representative (NMR) is agreeing to abide by the following conditions: a. To not publish, release, discuss or share information identified by JTF-Guantanamo personnel as being protected.

Other blanket provisions are included in the document such as ‘d.4. Embargoes may be imposed by the JTF-Public Affairs Officer when necessary to protect security’.

In addition to these embargoes and restrictions, JTF-GTMO also ensured that the author was accompanied at all times by a military Public Affairs Officer and a further Intelligence ‘Operations Security’ Officer, who was in civilian clothing and who was only referred to by forename. No other identifying information was supplied. At the end of the visit to the Camp Delta complex, the author also had to submit to a ‘security review panel’ which audited all still or video imagery taken during the visit and which was entitled to examine the author’s laptop or written notes taken during the period on Guantanamo Bay.

JTF-GTMO’s media policy document also points out that in addition to all of these restrictions, embargoes and scrutiny by Department of Defence officials, the journalist is liable to ‘criminal prosecution’ if in violation of the ‘ground rules’ or ‘instructions of the Public Affairs escort’.

In essence, the security pre-screening process, the JTF Media Policy document, the PAO and Operations Security escort along with the ‘security review panel’, individually and collectively comprise a system of censorship with which the journalist must comply in order to gain access to the story.

Despite the imposition of these restrictions, the author was given access to all five detention camps on Guantanamo including those containing ‘non-compliant’ and ‘high-risk’ categories of prisoners. The author was also given more or less complete access to all of the military personnel on the island and was allowed free rein in on-the-record interviews to discuss any aspect of the camp’s activities.



At the security review panel, no images, text or notes taken by the author were deleted, copied or censored by the US military authorities. Following the publication of the articles in *The Irish Times* in October and November of 2005 – which were explicitly critical of Camp Delta – the author received only positive feedback from JTF-GTMO and the US Embassy in Dublin. The nature of this off-the-record verbal feedback consisted of an acknowledgement of some of the ethical dilemmas posed by ‘war’ and an agreement that on some issues, the US Embassy would have to ‘agree to disagree’ with some points raised in the series of articles.

The author did feel however that the combined restrictions amounted to an explicit attempt on the part of the military authorities in their capacity as state-sponsored gatekeepers to impose restrictions on researchers/journalists in ways that constrain their capacity to produce or report on findings that threaten the interests of the powerful (see Renzetti and Lee, 1993: 27). In this case, the powerful elite in question consists of the Bush administration, JTF-GTMO’s political masters.

## Conclusion

This article has sought to highlight the manner in which both the Irish and US military operate systems of censorship that act to control the range and content of information communicated by both academic researchers and professional journalists. It highlights the links between normative critical theory as articulated by the political economy approach to communication whereby ‘powerful elites’ within society would seek to control potentially disruptive information and messages in order to preserve hegemonic views or the status quo. It also highlights similar concerns raised in the literature on research methodology about powerful gatekeepers particularly where access is an issue and especially as it relates to sensitive issues in secretive environments – whether that is the abuse of female employees in the Irish military or the circumstances surrounding hundreds of detentions at the US Naval Base, Guantanamo Bay.

The challenge for both academic researchers and professional journalists alike as they interact with the military is to be aware of this dynamic and to evolve professional responses that in some way counteract the unequal power relationship imposed by censorship. This aspiration is one of the central tenets of the political economy approach to communication – whether it is in learned discourse as researchers or popular discourse as journalists.

According to Mc Chesney:

The political economy of communication ... can probably be distinguished from all other forms of communication research by its explicit commitment to participatory democracy. Research is driven by a central premise drawn directly from classical democratic political theory: the notion that democracy is predicated upon an informed participating citizenry and that a political culture typified by an informed citizenry can only be generated in the final analysis by a healthy and vibrant media system. Accordingly, the political economy of communication has a strongly normative critique of the ways in which state policies and the media ... serve this ‘democratic function’ (McChesney et al., 1998:8).

I would conclude therefore that both journalists and researchers alike should adopt a robust professional ideology in order to counter state-sponsored attempts to suppress unpalatable truths by the imposition of legally binding restrictions and impositions. In order to counter these impositions, the first requirement is for insight on the part of



researchers and journalists as to the motivation of powerful gatekeepers in this regard. The second requirement is perhaps for collective action and lobbying on the part of third level institutions on the one hand and professional journalistic associations on the other to counter the military's justification for unnecessary censorship systems – often put in place in the name of 'the security of the state'.

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# John David Bourchier: an Irish Journalist in the Balkans

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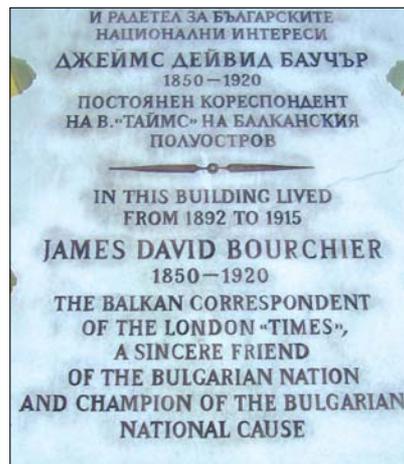
This article is based on initial research into the life of Bourchier carried out while the author worked on an EU journalism education project at the University of Sofia, Bulgaria.

## Introduction

In 1920, the funeral took place at the Rila Monastery in Bulgaria's Rhodope Mountains of the journalist John David Bourchier (1850-1920) of Bruff, Baggotstown, Co Limerick, Ireland. One newspaper in Sofia led with the headline: 'Our Bourchier is dead.' When news of his death became known in Sofia, a crowd gathered outside the hotel where he had lived on and off for 30 years. His funeral service was in the Alexander Nevski Memorial Church, a stunning monument of neo-Byzantine architecture that commemorates the Russian soldiers who died in the fight for Bulgarian freedom in 1877, from what is still referred to as the Turkish yoke. The Irish man's body lay in state in the cathedral, with his face uncovered in the Orthodox tradition. He had a huge funeral, and the crowds lined the route through the city as the cortege made its way to the mountains.

King Boris personally granted Bourchier's wish to be buried at Rila monastery. Rila is a mysterious place, situated in a high valley, surrounded by forests and high peaks that remain snow covered for much of the year. The fortified monastery is one of the most beautiful in Bulgaria, a country famous for its remote monasteries. It is also the centre of Bulgarian Orthodox spirituality. Bourchier is buried just outside the monastery walls. His grave is a simple granite slab, enclosed by a low metal rail, in a forest clearing. From the grave, the cupola of the monastery church can be seen. Today it is hard to find but, when he was buried, the clearing was much greater, and it would have been clearly visible from the road leading to the monastery gate.

One of Sofia's major roads is named Bourchier Boulevard. At what was the Grand Hotel Bulgarie, the only home he had in the Balkans, is a plaque describing *The Times* correspondent as a 'sincere friend of the Bulgarian nation and a champion of the Bulgarian national cause'. Once a brand of cigarettes was named in his honour, and a set of commemorative stamps issued with his image, including one featuring Bourchier wearing the Bulgarian peasant dress he liked to wear.



From 1888, Bourchier covered events in Bulgaria and the Balkans for the *London Times*. He was, however, much more than a reporter. He was, both publicly and privately, a defender of Bulgarian interests, who pleaded its cause internationally and insisted that Bulgaria and the Balkans had significance outside those deemed important by the great powers. Bourchier was at his post for 30 years, to the extent that he actually identified with the Bulgarian people and their national interests. At the same time, he maintained, it was still possible to be an impartial reporter while recognizing the rightness of a cause. In the 1990s, journalists covering wars in the Balkans would continue to struggle with the same issues.



Bourchier was one of many Irishmen who found their niche as reporters working in London or covering events abroad for the British press. A few of these are inscribed on a monument in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral commemorating journalists who covered military campaigns in the Sudan and other areas. The Irish names include Edmond O'Donovan of the *Daily News*, who had worked for the *Freeman's Journal*, and Frank Power of *The Irish Times*.

Also listed on the monument in St Paul's is Sir William Howard Russell, of *The Times*, 'the first and greatest war correspondent'. Russell, who was from Tallaght, Co Dublin, covered the Crimea war, with some controversy, for the *London Times* and like Bourchier was a graduate of Trinity College Dublin and of Anglo-Irish stock.

## Early life and career

Bourchier was born in 1850 into a family that could trace its roots back to the Anglo-Normans and, through his mother's family, to the Huguenots. After his father's death, his mother moved back to her family home at Castlecomer, Co Kilkenny, a place Bourchier also viewed as home right to the end of his life.

Bourchier was educated at Portora Royal, Enniskillen, at Trinity College Dublin and Cambridge University. He was a classical scholar and a musician. He intended being called to the Bar, but his increasing deafness on the one hand and lack of money on the other thwarted that ambition. Instead, he became a teacher at the English public school, Eton, where he was by all accounts unhappy. According to his biographer, Lady Grogan, he 'was unconventional and felt himself fettered and trammelled by the conventions of Eton; he made some lasting friends amongst the boys, but as a whole the genus boy did not appeal to him' (Grogan, 1932: 7). Nevertheless, he remained 10 years at Eton, despite his encroaching deafness which made teaching increasingly difficult. He took little part in school life but did write for a number of magazines and periodicals, including one piece on evictions in Ireland. After he left to take up journalism in the Balkans he was granted a small pension for three years (ibid).

According to a 1996 reassessment of Bourchier in his old newspaper, *The Times*, written to commemorate the restoration of his grave at Rila:

He was a private man, nervous, haunted by growing deafness, probably homosexual, but he became a close confidant of kings and ambassadors in their labyrinthine intrigues (*The Times*, 1996).

Journalism offered an alternative that Bourchier was aware of from the time he started teaching. He wrote for periodicals and magazines and there was little doubt that he viewed writing for reviews as building up an alternative to life at Eton. Lady Grogan says he wrote occasional articles for the press.

Some of his earliest described scenes of evictions in Ireland and drew the notice of *The Times*, though they were not written for that paper but published by the *Globe*; and these, I believe were largely responsible, together with his linguistic ability, for the offer on the part of the *Times* of foreign correspondent in the Near East. (Grogan, 1932: 7)

In 1888, aged 38 years, while on his way to the Adriatic coast, as recommended by his doctor, he had dinner with the British Ambassador in Vienna. There he met the *Times* Austrian correspondent, an old Etonian named Brinsley Richards. They discussed his journalistic ambitions but Bourchier had few illusions about his own talents as he had no experience writing about politics or foreign affairs. Several weeks later, he



received a telegram from the same correspondent, asking if he was free to cover a peasant uprising in Romania, and then go to Bulgaria which was in a state of turmoil, following a war, a coup by military officers, and the forced abdication of Prince Alexander. The Bulgarians subsequently found a new prince, Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg.

Bourchier travelled to Romania where, with journalistic luck, the uprising had grown in strength. He sent a few dispatches, and then went on to Bulgaria to cover Ferdinand's first tour of his territory. He never returned to teaching. During his first three years in the Balkans, he was freelance, offering pieces to the *Times* and to other reviews and journals. He wrote a long series on Bulgaria for the *Fortnightly Review*, which shows that it was the scenery that first attracted him, but it was not long before he became an expert on the politics of the region.

He travelled all over the Balkan Peninsula, making his first contacts with the insurgents seeking the independence of Crete, a cause he would also champion. He visited monasteries, and the remoter parts of Bulgaria, often living with peasants, eating their food and living in their homes, giving him a unique insight into the people and the place. He also learnt Bulgarian and Greek and had a passing knowledge of other languages of the area. He was gregarious and, despite his deafness, made friends and contacts easily.

Bourchier covered four wars and many insurrections in Crete, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, Romania, and Macedonia. Four kings he knew had to abdicate, and of the rulers and statesmen who were often his sources of information, eighteen met violent deaths. He also wrote with great authority on the archaeology of Greece and the classical world, and is credited with popularising interest in ancient Greece through his articles in the *Times*. He also covered the first Olympic Games in 1896.

## Bulgaria before Bourchier

In Bulgaria, during the 1870s, a nationalist movement grew in opposition to the Ottoman empire. In April 1876, an armed uprising in several Bulgarian regions took place which was suppressed by the Ottoman forces with such ferocity, wiping out entire villages, that European opinion swung entirely behind the Bulgarians. Support for Bulgarian independence thus became a fashionable cause. Gladstone's defence of the Bulgarians is still commemorated in Sofia, where he too has a street named after him. Following the uprising, the great powers tried to gain independence for Bulgaria through negotiations with the Ottoman Empire, but they were dismissed by the Turks. Finally, when all diplomatic efforts failed, Russia declared war on Turkey.

The outcome of the Russo-Turkish war was the Treaty of San Stefano. The treaty, signed in March 1878, established Bulgaria as a huge state that took in some of the Aegean coast, Thrace and, most importantly, much of present day Macedonia. According to the historian, R J. Crampton, it was 'in territorial terms ... as much as any Bulgarian nationalist could have hoped for or even dreamed of' (Crampton, 1997: 85).

It was, however, too much for Britain and Austro-Hungary who feared Bulgaria would become a major factor in Russian influence in the Balkans; it was Russian action, after all, which led to Bulgarian independence. They insisted that San Stefano be ripped up, and a new treaty, the Treaty of Berlin, was signed in July of the same year. This time, Bulgaria lost all it had gained and ended up 37 per cent the size it had been under San Stefano. It lost its gains in Macedonia, which had included the cities of Ohrid and Skopje, the present day capital, which was returned to Ottoman rule. The new, reduced Bulgaria would remain a vassal state of the Ottoman sultan (as in the San Stefano treaty) with a Christian prince, elected by the Bulgarians. Again, according to Crampton: 'The new Bulgarian state was to enter into life with a ready made programme for territorial expansion and a burning sense of injustice meted out to it by the great powers' (Crampton, 1997: 85). That was the state of play when Bourchier arrived in



1888, and would remain the main influence on Bulgarian politics up to the Second World War and beyond.

This was the context in which Bouchier began working as a journalist. Bulgaria and the Balkans were seen as pivotal to the stability of Europe and relations between the powers. It was this that made Bouchier so influential, in a way a foreign correspondent can never be today. His reports from the Balkans were read by politicians and the foreign office in London at a time when Britain was a major power and viewed events in the Balkans as important to the future of Europe. He was in constant touch with the House of Commons' Balkan Committee, and even though reporters were not given a by-line, the longer pieces for the likes of the *Fortnightly Review* ensured that he was a well-known expert on Balkan affairs. He also wrote the sections on Greece, Romania and Bulgaria for various editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. His position on *The Times* was not made permanent until January 1892, when he received a letter from the newspaper's manager, Moberly Bell, informing him that owing to other changes among *Times* correspondents, 'you will accordingly be fully recognised as our correspondent there' (Sofia) (Grogan, 1932: 20).

## Reporting Bulgaria

Bouchier was regularly accused of bias towards Bulgaria, especially by Greece, over his support for the Bulgarian wish to integrate Macedonia. But it was the Bulgarian government that accused him of false reporting, following the assassination of the former prime minister, Stefan Stambolov. Bouchier had been a good friend, despite what he described in the *Times* as Stambolov's 'decidedly Orientalist methods of government'. Bouchier wrote further: 'A heavy responsibility rests with those who refused Stambolov permission to leave the country, and who, detaining him here like a prisoner, neglected the measures necessary to ensure his safety' (*The Times*, 1895).

Outcry followed what was seen as an accusation against the government. Prince Ferdinand protested to the *Times*, eliciting a letter to Bouchier from the director of that newspaper's foreign department, Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace:

One thing, however, you ought to bear in mind: if you do your duty you will not satisfy the Palace. Already I have received complaints about your telegrams, and I have replied that I have full confidence in your judgment and impartiality. To this I have added that I do not believe any man with the independence of judgment requisite in a *Times* correspondent can possibly satisfy the authorities. (in Grogan, 1932: 46)

In the best journalistic tradition, Sir Donald followed this message with another saying:

As the spirit of political assassination seems to be abroad in Bulgaria it might be as well if you sent us a biography of Prince Ferdinand. I sincerely trust that it may lie in our pigeon hole for many years, but it is well to be prepared for all emergencies'. (ibid)

Bouchier had to leave Bulgaria because of his reporting of atrocities against Pomaks, Bulgarians who had converted to Islam, who were attacked in retaliation whenever Macedonians suffered at the hands of Turkey. He was ordered by the *Times* to go into a dangerous mountainous region to find eyewitnesses to corroborate his reports. It took 12 weeks hard investigation, interviewing frightened Muslims, but in the end he proved that there had been terrible atrocities against them.

However much he was able to show, to the satisfaction of the *Times* at any rate, that he was impartial, he was still able to identify with the aspirations of both the people of



Crete and the Bulgarians, to the extent that he was able to advise governments and senior officials. At the time of the formation of the Balkan league, prior to the first Balkan war, he even acted as a secret mediator between governments.

When his differences with the Bulgarian authorities dissipated, he moved back to the two hotel rooms he occupied in Sofia, opposite the Royal Palace. He was often seen galloping on his horse through the city, with his Bulgarian servant, Ivan Gruev. He was also frequently at the royal palace and the king (Ferdinand had declared full independence in 1908 and was now king) could be heard by passers-by over the palace wall, bellowing into Bouchier's ear trumpet as he briefed the correspondent.

Bouchier covered the two Balkan Wars as well as the First World War. He worked tirelessly to get Bulgaria to enter the war on the side of the allies. He knew that Bulgaria would side with whoever would guarantee an outcome that would include integrating Macedonia into Bulgaria. Both sides were interested in courting Bulgaria, if only to ensure that the country's large army would not be used against it. The price was, of course, Macedonia. The Central Powers were willing to offer not just Macedonia, but Thrace as well. The Allies were willing to offer parts of Thrace and whatever parts of Macedonia Serbia was willing to give up, following its success in the Second Balkan War in 1913. Bulgaria entered the war in 1915 on the Central Powers' side.

Following the war, Bulgaria lost nearly all the gains it had made by entering the war at the signing of the treaty of Neuilly, in 1919. Bulgaria was not represented at the treaty negotiations. However, Bouchier acted as an unofficial representative. He moved into rooms in Paris and argued with whoever would talk to him that Bulgaria was only a belligerent because of its unfulfilled national destiny, the integration of all Bulgarian people, including those in Macedonia. It was the losses of the Second Balkan War of 1913 that caused it to join the Central Powers. Had the allies offered them what was rightly theirs, he argued, Bulgaria would not have joined the other side. It was a matter of justice and freedom for a people who, he maintained, were ethnic Bulgarians but had never been allowed to live together as Bulgarians, except for a brief period following the treaty of San Stefano. In a letter to the *Times* in January 1919, he wrote that the question being dealt with at the peace conference was one of 'ethnography, not rewards and punishments, and since it was so, Bulgaria's rightful claim to Macedonia, were not to be disregarded' (quoted in Pandev et al., 1993: 10).

He had left Bulgaria when it joined the war, and reported for the *Times* from Ukraine and Russia, before returning to London. He retired from the *Times* in 1918 and so, presumably, felt free to argue what he perceived as the rightness of the Bulgarian cause. The writer and journalist, Robert Kaplan, in his book, *Balkan Ghost*, compares Bouchier's role at the peace conference to that of T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia, with his arguments for the future independence of Arabia (Kaplan, 1994: 230). He is correct in that they were both lone voices, arguing for a cause that no one was interested in anymore. Even more poignant was that while Bouchier probably knew more about Bulgaria and the Balkans than anyone else at the Conference, he was never consulted:

The reason is not far to seek. Bouchier was looked on as the champion of an ex-enemy country, and all that he has to say was discounted and discredited in advance. (Grogan, 1932: 186)

With his pension from the *Times*, Bouchier planned to write books, including a memoir, dividing his time between his Kilkenny home, London and Sofia. He purchased some land in Sofia on which he planned to build a house, named the Curragh. Bouchier's health was not good, but he gave himself no rest. In Ireland he wrote articles for reviews, all dealing with the future of the Balkans. He even spent some time in a Dublin nursing home before returning to Bulgaria.



## Outsider in Britain, champion in the Balkans

Bourchier was born into an Anglo-Irish family in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, with all that implies as far as class, position, and political opinions. However, as history shows such generalizations do not always apply. There was another factor, his living in England from the time he went to Cambridge and then to Eton to teach. With the scarcity of biographical material, (there is one biography, and diaries that record little more than dates and appointments), it is not fanciful to suggest that Bourchier's support for and strong advocacy of Bulgarian independence and for the freedom of Macedonia and earlier, Crete, was influenced by his own experiences.

Bourchier was a typical product of his class. He identified with Britain and never seemed to allude to his Irish birth. Those he met were not necessarily struck by his Irishness. In fact the Irish journalist and parliamentarian, TP O'Connor, when asked to write an appreciation following Bourchier's death, remarks that he believed Bourchier was a fellow countryman, but he was not aware of that when they met. His biographer, Lady Grogan, suggests he had some stereotypical qualities such as gregariousness, which she ascribed to his being Irish. In his writings, with the exception of some early pieces he wrote while still at Eton, he never wrote nor made comparisons with Ireland. Nevertheless, it is not too fanciful to speculate as to what affect his background had on his thinking, There was nothing like going to England for the Anglo-Irish to realise how different the Irish part of their identity made them. It also true that the Anglo-Irish or Ascendancy were not English. As the nationalist literary figure Daniel Corkery wrote:

It would be well for all outsiders who would understand Ireland and its tragic history, or indeed any phase of it, always to keep before them the fact that the Ascendancy mind is not the same thing as the English mind. (Corkery, 1924: 9)

Acceptance in Britain on equal terms was not always the case for the Anglo-Irish. William Howard Russell craved that acceptance by the British establishment, and, despite the immense influence of his journalism, it only came late and somewhat reluctantly. In 1853, a British captain in the Crimea war, writing home, gives an indication of how Russell was perceived by the English establishment:

a vulgar low Irishman ... but he has the gift of the gab, uses his pen as well as his tongue, sings a good song, drinks anyone's brandy and water and smokes as many cigars as foolish young officers will let him, and is looked by most in camp as a Jolly Good Fellow. He is just the sort to get information, particularly out of the youngsters. And I assure you more than one "Nob" has thought it best to give him a shake of the hand rather than the cold shoulder en passant, for [he] is rather an awkward gentleman to be on bad terms with. (quoted in de Burgh, 2000: 34)

So working either at the heart of empire in London or in North Africa or other theatres of imperial adventure, or in the case of Bourchier, in the Balkans, the Irish journalist is an outsider because of his Irishness or because of his politics, all of which force him to be detached, objective. Irish journalists at home and abroad were often forced to adopt a detachment that allowed them to go about their job even when their own politics clashed with the politics of the publication. This was clearly the case for Bourchier who so often differed in his views of the Balkans from those of both the *Times* and especially the British government to the extent that following the First World War he was a champion of one of the enemy states.

Sir Shane Lesley nicely summed up the ambiguity of the establishment towards both the Irish and journalists in a quote that given Bourchier's career he might have found amusing:



The Etonian is the most marked among the types that spring out of the public school. He is the caste composed of ruling and adventurous, half educated but honourable men. All professions accept his leadership except journalism and stock jobbing, which, as subsidiary to literature and commerce, are largely left to Celts and Jews. (Leslie, 1916: 47)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Professor Tadhg Foley of NUI, Galway, for drawing this to my attention.

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Bourchier's championing of small nations, such as Crete, and, most importantly, Bulgaria, was not unique, though his understanding and identification with the Bulgarian and Macedonian peasantry was. His knowledge of Bulgarian and Greek, his understanding of customs and traditions and the feelings of Bulgarians towards him indicates more than a fashionable obsession with the Other. It could well be that his Irishness, and being an outsider, allowed him a different and very non-English view of the Balkans, permitting him to see the world through the eyes of others. His view was not just romantic, but also political, in terms of independence, liberty and democracy, views that would also be at variance with the majority of his own class at home in Ireland.

Only days before he died, he was asked to give an address to a Macedonian delegation. He thanked them for their appreciation of his efforts 'for the cause of justice and freedom', continuing:

The principles of autonomy and self-determination, proclaimed by President Wilson and accepted with enthusiasm by all the statesmen of Europe, have been rejected by those to whom Providence has entrusted the sacred duty of providing for the welfare and future happiness of the Balkan people. In no single instance has the right of plebiscite been accorded to any of those people. To find a parallel for the crime which has been committed in the dismemberment of your country we must go back to the partition of Poland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Poland has waited and the day of her liberation has come. Be assured that the day of freedom will also dawn for Macedonia. (Grogan, 1932: 204)

After his death, there were many tributes to Bourchier. Former prime ministers of both Greece and Bulgaria described him as a friend of their respective countries. As late as 1983, the official Sofia Press published *The Times Correspondent Reporting from Sofia* (Pandev et al, 1983), a collection of Bourchier's articles, mainly used to argue for the incorporation of Macedonia into Bulgaria. According to the introduction (p.10), 'Bulgaria cherishes the sacred memory of James Bourchier'. The collection was declared a modest tribute to his work as a 'journalist and a humane man, a champion of the oppressed and a fighter for equality in relations among the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula' (ibid). In the end, this remarkable journalist, scion of the Anglo-Irish, was commemorated by kings, peasants, politicians and even the Communist authorities of Bulgaria.

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## Burke, R. 2005. *The Decline and Fall of The Irish Press*

Dublin: Currach Press. 440pp., €19.99 (pbk.)

ISBN 1-85607-924-4

**Eddie Brennan**

To date the most noteworthy book on the *Irish Press* has been the Mark O'Brien's (2001) *De Valera, Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press*. O'Brien spans the 20th century explaining the creation and decline of the paper. Burke's book offers a more recent history devoting an entire book to a period that O'Brien discusses in two closing chapters (1980-2001). In this respect the two books are excellent companion pieces, which together offer a comprehensive history of the *Irish Press*.

To understand ownership, diversity and readership in the present we must understand the past. In this respect, the demise of the *Irish Press*, as one of three major national titles, has left an important legacy for Ireland's media ecology. Burke offers many lessons of relevance to today's media. In his account of Ralph Ingersoll's involvement with the *Irish Press* he offers a grim account of a meeting between media and speculative trading. Ingersoll, described as a 'debt without fear entrepreneur', acquired a 50 per cent share in the two subsidiaries of the Irish Press Group. This was to be a mark of prestige for Ingersoll Publications in the midst of a spending spree on low-cost provincial papers in the United States. Typically, these papers were editorially gutted to accommodate advertising. This combined strategy was to elevate Ingersoll to the level of media mogul. Ingersoll, however, became undone: initially, with the demise of the *Saint Louis Sun*, a flagship project; secondly, most of his assets were tied up in junk bonds acquired through the advice of Michael Milken (later jailed for racketeering). While the Ingersoll deal initially appeared to be a lifeline for the *Irish Press* its involvement in a web of global finance added to its woes.

Ingersoll adopted a one-size-fits-all approach to his American newspaper titles. Burke quotes him as saying 'my conception of a well-managed newspaper is the difference between a 10 per cent profit margin and a 30 per cent profit margin'. Similarly, the management strategies of Eamon de Valera Jnr. showed no awareness of the peculiarity of newspaper management as was evident in the Press Group's approach to new production technologies.

Following Eddie Shah's union-avoiding freesheets and Rupert Murdoch's union-destroying Wapping initiative, the days of hot metal printing were clearly numbered. All Irish newspapers made the, sometimes painful, transition to computerised typesetting but none suffered the level of convulsion seen at the *Irish Press*. Burke cites Tim Pat Coogan who recalled that 'alone of all the major Irish newspaper groups, the Press papers managed to create a strike over the introduction of computerised typesetting'.

New technology may have been a catalyst in the paper's demise but the true cause lay elsewhere. As Burke sets out in great detail, it was a catalogue of strikes, stoppages, price increases, along with an infamous misjudged editorial that eventually sank the *Irish Press*. This was, in large part, a story of bad management at the hands of Eamon de Valera Jr. The fate of the *Irish Press* is captured by a metaphor used in the opening pages of the book. It is a description of a black Mercedes driven by Eamon de Valera while ferrying Vincent Jennings, general manager of the Irish Press Group, on their many trips to the Four Courts. The state of the car mirrors the fate of the newspaper.

No longer as powerful or as prestigious as it once was, the car is showing signs of wear and tear. Its owner is in the driving seat only as a result of inheritance. He has never held the steering wheel of any vehicle before taking over this one. (Burke 2005: 23)



The ultimate reason for the demise of the *Irish Press* then went beyond bad management in its final years. It faltered because of the legacy set by its founder Eamon de Valera. Despite being an important national title it was run as a dynastic system that failed to adapt to a changing society. In this respect, Burke's book neatly links up with O'Brien's work. O'Brien reveals Eamon de Valera's tactics in the paper's creation and follows them to the paper's downfall. Burke, however, complements and adds to this by bringing an unprecedented level of detail to these final years.

The book is reasonably lengthy at 398 pages plus notes. A formidable piece of research, it is at the same time a well paced and compelling read throughout. *Press Delete* is likely to become essential reading for anyone hoping to understand Irish media past and present.

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Dublin: Irish Academic Press.

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## Conor Brady *Up with the Times*

Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005. 286pp., €19.99 (hdbk.)

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### Harry Browne

As a former journalistic employee of *The Irish Times*, and therefore a former subordinate of Conor Brady, your reviewer can hardly be expected to resist the temptation to scold the newspaper's ex-editor for the editorial shortcomings of this memoir. So let's get that out of the way: on more than one occasion in the book the same information is repeated, in similar phrases, on separate pages, as though two different drafts are co-existing here; the author gets a number of details in the history of *The Irish Times* wrong, e.g. when precisely the newspaper began to run its summary 'News Digest' on page-one; and, quite significantly, his chapter on 11 September, 2001 (when he was absent from the paper's offices) gives the mistaken impression that *The Irish Times* failed to publish the following day. In fact the paper did not publish on the 'national day of mourning', Friday, 14 September. While Brady doesn't explicitly state that it failed to appear on the 12th, his time-sequence is sufficiently misleading to have caused Gill & Macmillan to state as much in its press release for the book's launch.

This sort of error means that anyone using *Up with the Times* as a historical resource should proceed with caution. Nonetheless, it is an important book that provides some new insight into the Irish newspaper business during what will doubtless be remembered as a crucial period of change for the medium and the country. Brady became editor of *The Irish Times* at the very end of 1986, and left the job (assuming the lofty title of 'Editor Emeritus'), in late 2002. With the help of the Celtic Tiger, the demise of the Press group and the low emphasis placed on the Irish 'quality' daily market by British titles, he led the paper to a 50 per cent rise in circulation over that period, while contending with the threats and opportunities presented by 24-hours news channels and the internet.



Brady is not shy about highlighting the millennial significance of this time period, nor about showing the special place of an *Irish Times* editor in understanding and anticipating social change. He starts the book with a series of vignettes from his first few months in the job in 1987, when, slightly bewildered, he encounters, in turn: an expert colleague, who assures him that the Soviet Union is unravelling; Charlie Haughey, who tells him the Irish economy is going to take off, with a 'bright young fella' called Dermot Desmond revolutionising financial services, a 'new cultural district' in Temple Bar and 'a fella called Goodman up in County Louth' getting Irish beef into international markets big-time; Pádraic White of the IDA, who tells him the microchip business is set for massive growth and Ireland is going to be 'well placed'; John Hume, who tells him peace is coming to Northern Ireland; and Father Dermot McCarthy, who tells him the Catholic Hierarchy has lost touch with Irish society.

It is a nice conceit, and one that establishes for the reader that the author is a big-picture kind of guy, prepared to think hard and talk to the right people around Ireland's changing place in the world and his newspaper's changing place in Ireland. His reflections lead him to the conclusion that *The Irish Times* should stop viewing itself in relation to the British or US (or indeed other Irish) media, that it is in many ways more comparable to an upmarket Danish or Finnish paper. And those papers, he notes, get much of their foreign news from their own correspondents, so the news reflects their countries' unique outlook. Thus *The Irish Times* develops a controversial, unprecedented (and now reduced) foreign presence under Brady.

Brady is not retrospectively hard on his own judgments, either about such large and long-term matters or about coverage of particular stories and personalities – the Bishop Casey affair, President Mary Robinson. Readers and former colleagues might take issue with his views on these and other matters. Meanwhile, the major thread of negativity that runs through his book, and probably its most important contribution for those seeking a close understanding of how this esteemed media institution has functioned internally, is the story of the recurring crises around the operation of the company that runs *The Irish Times* and the trust that owns it.

The terms of *The Irish Times* Trust establish some of its most attractive alleged values, including a commitment to peace, diversity and openness to minority views. Perhaps more importantly, the trust also protects the paper from take-over by a Murdoch or an O'Reilly for as long as it stays solvent. But for Brady's tenure it seems the main consequence was that the business was in the hands of an all-powerful chairman, Major Thomas McDowell – 'the Major', complete with monocle, waistcoat and pocket-watch. While Brady doesn't suggest he was hamstrung editorially, it is clear he views the tense and muddled corporate environment, the jockeying for position, the arrogance and ambition of many executives from the 'commercial' side of the house, as having been substantial and unwelcome distractions that limited his achievements in an editorship that had already lasted longer than he intended when it was brought down by the paper's post-9/11 financial crisis.

Brady's legacy is, nonetheless, considerable. *Up with the Times* is not the last word on it. But it is intelligent and thoughtful, and should be read by anyone interested in a powerful insider's view of establishment Ireland and its media, in a period of intense upheaval that has not yet ended.

